



NORTH CENTRAL COLLEGE
Leadership Academy

Character Thought Leader Biographies

Suzanne Bright, Ed.D.



Suzanne Bright, Ed.D is an educational leader and expert in the area of creating and sustaining caring, high-performing schools and organizations. Dr. Bright has over 25 years of diverse experience in leadership, school administration, character education, professional development, and comprehensive school reform. Her passion and expertise are in facilitating and supporting high quality teaching and professional learning that empowers and inspires teachers and leaders across the country.

Suzanne's passion for character education was ignited through her participation in the Leadership Academy for Character Education (LACE) in 2001-2003. She went on to serve as a coach for the CHARACTERplus/U.S. Department of Education research project which yielded an evidence-based character education

process proven to increase school-wide academic performance, lower classroom referrals, and improve culture and climate. In addition, she served as the CHARACTERplus Program Coordinator where she designed, led, and implemented the inaugural Missouri Schools of Character program, a parallel process to the National Schools of Character Competition conducted by Character Education Partnership. This program is still thriving and now boasts 73 Missouri Schools of Character.

Dr. Bright went on to serve as the principal of a National School of Character in a National District of Character. Under her leadership as principal, the school experienced significant academic growth and improvement and rose to rank in the top ten schools in Missouri (6th overall). She successfully supported a safe, caring, and autonomous environment for students and supported positive change in staff culture to one that was built on listening, understanding, creating new insights, reaching consensus, giving and receiving feedback, and celebrating success. Character education was the fundamental component of this success.

Currently in her role as President and CEO of Orca Solutions, Dr. Bright partners with schools and districts across the country in developing and sustaining caring and high-performing school communities. She offers leadership and support for teaching and learning through presentations, workshops, institutes, and other professional learning experiences.

In addition to her extensive national and international work as a consultant and keynote speaker, Dr. Bright mentors aspiring principals through the Center for Character and Citizenship (CCC) CEEL program, a multi-layer professional development experience which incorporates Servant Leadership into the CCC LACE program. She also teaches university courses at Missouri Baptist University in the areas of leadership and curriculum and instruction.

Dr. Bright received her Ed.D. from Missouri Baptist University with an emphasis in Leadership in Teaching and Learning. Additional academic achievements include an M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from the University of Mississippi and a B.S.Ed. in Elementary Education from the University of Memphis.

In her free time, Suzanne enjoys family time with her husband, her teenage son, and her two Havanese dogs. Her volunteer interests include supporting foster families through various local foster care agencies and working in the children's ministry at her church. Her hobbies include working out, hiking, reading, and watching Ole Miss and University of Memphis sports. She and her family enjoy traveling, and she frequently visits her family in the south.

Julie Frugo, Ed. D.



For over 25 years Julie Frugo, Ed.D. has been a thought leader in the education field. Never satisfied with the status quo, her quest to serve more, do more and create more led her from the classroom in the suburbs of Chicago to becoming a founding member of the first charter school in St. Louis MO. Julie has served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal and since 2010 the CEO/Superintendent of Premier Charter School (PCS).

Premier Charter School opened the doors in 2000 and continues to operate as a highly diverse school serving 1,000+ students, speaking 17 different languages in grades Pre K-8. As the only charter school in the St. Louis area designated as both a State and National School of Character, Dr. Frugo,

who is a Leadership Academy of Character Education (LACE) graduate, has been at the heart of the school's character education journey. Her entrepreneurial spirit and relentless pursuit to keep relationship building and empowerment at the center of the work has resulted in a truly amazing

place for kids and adults. She continues to lead and develop the 165+ faculty and staff in deep work around maintaining a character-driven culture that supports the curious and empowered learner.

Dr. Frugo received her Master's degree in Educational Leadership and her Ed.D. at the University Missouri - St. Louis under the mentorship of Marvin Berkowitz, Ph.D. as a part of the Character Education and Democratic School Governance cohort. Julie was most interested in how leaders support, empower, and cultivate professional learning, and growth in faculty and staff. Engaging through a lens of professional development, Julie eventually created a new framework of leadership called Professional Growth Leadership. Additionally, she has collaborated with three of her Ed. D. cohort peers to create the Connected Leader Framework. Julie has spent time sharing her story as a speaker at national conferences (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Association for Moral Education, Character Education Partnership, Learning Forward) and works with schools around the region. She was honored as Leader of the Year by Missouri Public Charter School Association and has been interviewed and quoted for several publications including a feature in Parade Magazine.

Although Julie considers the PCS team part of her family, she also loves spending time with her own immediate family, Greg and Wrigley (her sweet Cavipoo pup). She is the youngest of 6 kids and her extended family is large in numbers, but they are extremely close. Julie, Greg and Wrigley hit the road often to Chicago for visits, and yes she is a die-hard Cubs fan! She loves to travel and finds inspiration and energy from meeting new people and visiting new places. Julie has always had a love of music and had a long stretch of singing at weddings (mostly friends and family). Now when she has the gift of some extra time you can find her writing poems or song lyrics while she procrastinates writing her first book!

Matthew J. Klosterman



Matthew J Klosterman retired in 2019 after a 36-year career in public education. He began his career as a school psychologist before transitioning to a variety of administration roles: Director of Pre-K, Director of Title I, Director of Special Education, Principal, Assistant Superintendent for Finance, and the last 14 years of his career as Superintendent of schools in Belleville District 118. He served on a variety of Boards of Directors in and around the Belleville, Illinois community.

During his tenure, seven schools were named State Schools of Character, four schools named National Schools of Character and the District named as a National District of Character. Matthew has presented at several conferences and has worked with other districts as they grew their character education initiatives in addition to serving as an evaluator for Character.org. Matthew

received his Bachelor degree from Washington University-St. Louis and his Master's degree from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, in addition to having an administrative endorsement from SIU-E and a superintendent endorsement from SIU-Carbondale.

Kristen Pelster, ED.S.



Programming Consultant, Center for Character and Citizenship & Senior Director of Programming, CharacterPlus

Over two decades as an educator then administrator, a **National School of Character** recipient and a St. Louis Region **Middle School Principal of the Year**, the best way to describe Kristen would begin with her turn-around story of Ridgewood Middle School. RMS suffered from low attendance, low academic achievement, and disciplinary problems where

36% of its students were on free or reduced lunch. With character education as the focus, RMS transformed itself into one of **Missouri's Top Ten Most Improved Schools** in science, communication arts, and math. The difference as shared by Kristen? Dedicated administrative leadership emphasizing effective character education. For nearly a decade Kristen served as the district leader for character education. Not satisfied with her school becoming a National School of Character, her work throughout Fox C-6 was recognized as a **National District of Character**. That incredible journey took Kristen before **the Senate in Washington, D.C** testifying on the positive impact "social, emotional and character development" has on students regardless of their circumstance.

Kristen believes that "character education, if truly implemented as the foundational philosophy that infiltrates every aspect of the school setting, can work miracles." Kristen has been a keynote speaker at several character education related conferences and was featured in a **USA Today** article entitled, "**What Can Schools Do**". Outside of work, Kristen serves in different capacities at Oak Bridge Community Church, African Vision of Hope and Missouri Baptist University. Her hobbies include attending as many theater productions and St. Louis Blues hockey games as she possibly can!

Julie Sperry, Ed.D.



Character Focused Leadership Development Specialist

Dr. Julie Sperry is a retired National School of Character principal and LACE (Leadership Academy in Character Education) graduate. Currently, Julie works at CharacterPlus as the Director of Leadership Academies. Previously, Julie worked for the Missouri Department of Education as a Leadership Development Specialist and Training Facilitator - creating learning experiences for leaders across the state. Julie also served as Executive Director of CHARACTERplus from 2016 through 2018. Julie has a rich history with CharacterPlus graduating from the Leadership Academy for Character Education (LACE) and leading her

middle school in the Brentwood School District to National School of Character status. Previously, she served for two years as Director of the Regional Professional Development Center at EducationPlus. Through her leadership roles with both CharacterPlus and EducationPlus, she was responsible for generating resources and guiding the professional staff of these agencies that, through their wide variety of leadership and character-building programs, had the potential to impact over 30,000 educational leaders and 330,000 students annually. She has also had the honor of presenting at conferences regionally, statewide, nationally and even internationally on leadership, character and culture.

Julie has held a variety of roles during her 30+ year career in education. After graduating summa cum laude from Knox College in Galesburg, IL, she spent 7 years as a middle school math and reading teacher, middle school counselor and high school volleyball coach in the Fort Zumwalt School District. She also spent time as an Academic Counselor for St. Charles Community College. Her leadership journey took a new path in 1996 when she became an Assistant Principal at Parkway Central Middle School, and then in 1999 accepted the role of Principal at Brentwood Middle School for 14 proud years. During this time, with the LACE program and her Doctoral work inspiring her, was able to lead the school to both State and National School of Character status. In addition, Julie has served as adjunct faculty at Fontbonne, Lindenwood and UMSL universities. She earned masters and specialist degrees in both administration and secondary counseling from UMSL, and an Ed.D. in 2010 from Maryville University.

Julie's work around leadership has given her many opportunities to help develop and implement transformational leadership focused on positive change. Her passion is to help make programs and people stronger and better equipped to create cultures of success for all.